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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: THE NATIVES ARE RESTLESS

1. Summary: The Omani Internet chat room "Sablat al-Arab" -- or simply "Al-Sablah" -- is the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, Al-Sablah nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

--- The Sultan's Cable To President Bush
--- Demolishing the Diwan (Omani Royal Court)
--- Call For Demonstration

End summary.

Sour Grapes

2. Sultan Qaboos' cable congratulating President Bush on his re-election triggered feelings of discontent among Al-Sablah members. One participant expressed his disappointment with the cable, saying "Oman has a close relationship with the United States that the Sultan wants to consolidate; however, this is not the general feeling among the Omanis." Expressions of anger and sadness at the futility of changing Omani government policy dominated the topic, including the following comment: "We cannot do anything except say 'Congratulations' to Bush. This is what our government wants from us." Another member sarcastically remarked, "You [Bush] deserved victory in the election, for you fought terrorism for three years by attacking Afghanistan and Iraq."

Down With The Diwan

3. Speculation about the budget of the Diwan, Oman's Royal Court, was a contentious issue in Al-Sablah. Many participants argued that at the beginning of Sultan Qaboos' reign, the Diwan was esteemed as a source of aid for needy Omanis. However, as one participant put it, "The Diwan is now viewed as a means by which VIPs, Al Saids [the royal family] and Sheikhs can obtain luxury items." One bold individual argued, "This worthless ministry should be done away with. It is a waste of Oman's wealth."

Demonstrably Upset

4. In recent days, a call was put forth in Al-Sablah urging university and high school students in Oman to demonstrate in front of the U.S. Embassy to show support for the Iraqi people. The author of the call wrote, "Let's all unify against the aggressor and march peacefully to express our rejection of the crimes that America is committing in Iraq." One respondent replied, "Let's show as much support for the Iraqis in Fallujah as we did for the Palestinians in Jenin when they were attacked by the Israelis." Many subscribers supported the idea of a demonstration, and several suggested that a demonstration also be held at the British Embassy and at the governors' offices in each province. However, most participants expressed pessimism about the usefulness of demonstrations. One contributor asked, "What good would a demonstration in Oman do? Would it make the U.S. and Britain change their position?" Another commented, "We Muslims are in a long sleep. Will we not wake up until we hear the sound of airplanes attacking us?"

BALTIMORE